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ABSTRACT

A conceptual and practical structure for designing a local native language and culture curriculum for preschool through grade 9 is presented. The first section outlines the program's philosophy, rationale, and general and specific learner expectations, and offers an overview of the suggested linguistic and cultural content of such a program. The second section more specifically describes program content for each instructional division (early childhood through grade 3, grades 4-6, and grades 7-9), including elements of traditional culture, legends, daily routines, and contemporary cultural events and activities appropriate to that level. This section also contains a list of the most common linguistic functions and notions as a frame of reference for teachers to plan lessons, chart individual student progress, and keep records of what has been taught. (A more detailed list of notions and functions is appended). Section three presents guidelines and suggestions for implementation, addressing aspects of program development and community involvement, issues related to aboriginal language teaching (dialect variation, literacy, and orthography), language development and communicative competence, and tailoring program elements to suit local needs. (MSE)

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ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PROGRAMS

A Curricular Framework

(Early Childhood Services – Grade 9)

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ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PROGRAMS

A Curricular Framework

(Early Childhood Services – Grade 9)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS v

PREFACE vii

SECTION ONE: PROGRAM STATEMENT

Introduction 1
Philosophy and Rationale 2
General and Specific Learner Expectations 3
Statement of Content 5
Cultural Component 5
Linguistic Component 9

SECTION TWO: SPECIFICATION OF CONTENT

The Cultural Component 11
Early Childhood Services and Division I 11
Division II 13
Division III 15
The Linguistic Component 17
Functions 17
Notions 19

SECTION THREE: GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Program Development and Community Involvement 21
Role of the Community 21
Role of the Administrator 21
Role of the Teacher 22
Role of the Student 22
Issues Related to Teaching Aboriginal Languages 22
Language Development 24
What Is Language? 24
How Is Language Developed? 24

What Are Aspects of Communicative Competence? 24
Program Use 25
Entry Points 25
The Communicative Approach to Teaching 26
Record-Keeping and Evaluation 27
Guidelines for Learning Resources 28

APPENDIX
Linguistic Functions and Notions 31

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Development Team

Mitsuko Oishi	Developer
Leo Fox	Consultant (Blood)
Barbara Laderoute	Consultant (Cree)
Emma Lee Warrior	Consultant (Peigan)
Nora Yellowknee	Consultant (Cree)

Elders

Maggie Francheater	Sunchild Band
Jim Manybears	Blackfoot Reserve
George Yellowknee	Bigstone Band
Louise Yellowknee	Bigstone Band

Native Language Education Ad Hoc Committee

Harrison Black Plume	Elder, Blood Band
Louise Crop Eared Wolf	Elder, Blood Band
Marie Crowchild	Teacher, Sarcee Band
Isla Ettinger	Teacher, County of Ponoka
Elaine Verchomin Harasymiw (Chairperson)	Program Manager, Second Languages, Alberta Education
Adelaide Heavy Shields	Elder, Blood Band
Emily Hunter	Assistant Professor, School of Native Studies, University of Alberta
Wally Lazaruk (ex officio)	Associate Director, Second Languages, Alberta Education
Matthew Many Guns	Elder, Blackfoot Band
Lorraine Cardinal Pasicka	Teacher, High Prairie RCSSD

Judy Pelly	Consultant, Native Education Project, Alberta Education
Robert Sunwalk	Coordinator, Education Committee, Blackfoot Band
Jeanette Tootoosis	Teacher, Calgary RCSSD
Theresa C. Wildcat	Elder, Erminskin Band
Elsie Wingeno	Teacher, Calgary RCSSD

Former Committee Members

Vivian Ayoungman
Grace Buffalo
Pearl Calahasen
Barbara Laderoute
Cora Weber-Pillwax
Lena Russell
Denis Tardif (ex officio)
Russel Wright

Alberta Education acknowledges the contribution of the following individuals to the production of this document:

Valerie Dennehy	Curricular Assistant (Cree)
Harvine Delorme	Curricular Assistant (Blackfoot)
Anita Jenkins	Editor (English)
Helen Czar	Editorial Advisor
Tina Reilhan	Word Processor Operator

PREFACE

"With the loss of our language, we lose everything . . . . We must keep our language. With it come the teachings of the old ones and it's the only thing that will preserve what is truly Indian . . . . Our future as a people doesn't look too good . . . . Tell the young people they must learn and keep their language . . . ."

– *Maggie Francheater*
Sunchild Band

"It is time we work together and try to work toward preserving our individual cultures and languages . . . ."

– *Jim Manybears*
Blackfoot Reserve

Bringing aboriginal languages and cultures into the schools of Alberta is more than a product; it is a process. This process, which involves students, educators, parents, Elders, administrators and government, is ongoing. It is a never-ending challenge to respond in a cooperative spirit to the constantly changing needs and expectations of the aboriginal peoples, and of the society they live in.

All Albertans can profit from the strength that Native students acquire by exploring their roots, and from the strength that is derived from encouraging all Albertans to accept diversity. Our expectations are high, but so is the resolve of the many people who have worked thus far in the process.

Section One

PROGRAM STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION

This document is a framework for use in developing local aboriginal language and culture programs for Early Childhood Services to grade 9. Such programs may be offered in any school in the province, if the local aboriginal community so wishes and is willing to support it through its interest and active participation. These programs should be open to both aboriginal and non-aboriginal students.

This curricular framework is intended as a guide for local program developers. Therefore, Alberta Education's philosophy, rationale, general and specific expectations, and prescribed content for the aboriginal programs are broad and relatively undefined. It is important for program developers to have considerable flexibility in applying and adapting the program to suit a specific aboriginal language and culture.

This framework is the result of intensive discussion and consultation with many individuals and groups from aboriginal communities. Local educators are urged to follow a similar process when they develop specific programs for use in their communities.

PHILOSOPHY AND RATIONALE

In large part, Alberta Education's involvement in aboriginal language and culture education arises in response to the concerns of the aboriginal communities themselves. Since approximately 65% of Treaty Indians and 95% of the Metis and non-status Indian populations are now registered in provincial schools, Alberta Education has become increasingly aware of its responsibilities to this group of students.

For some time members of the aboriginal community have been using school jurisdictions to offer a curriculum that is more relevant to their children; they have been asking for a program that would give these children a more positive grounding in their unique heritage and a stronger sense of self-worth. These people are saying that formal instruction in aboriginal languages and cultures in schools would give these languages and cultures a new legitimacy – both in the eyes of the non-aboriginal population and among the aboriginal people themselves.

The aboriginal language and culture programs will, we hope, revitalize and reaffirm those languages and cultures, and promote tolerance and understanding in the society at large.

Clearly, there are considerable benefits for students in these programs. The programs will support many of the social and affective goals of Alberta's education programs; as well, they will give students basic skills in a second language and an introduction to a culture that is either a part of their personal heritage or a part of their province's history and social fabric.

This framework is developed on the basis of three principles:

1. Language is a conduit for culture; therefore, the language must be taught **with** the culture, if not **for** the culture (the holistic perspective on language learning).

2. The framework itself and the programs which are produced from it, serve only as guides for the communities that will be using them. There must be enough flexibility to permit local variations and to address local needs. (Note: Although

the programs must reflect the uniqueness of the communities they serve, there should also be a balanced approach – it is important as well to have consistent standards of student achievement and a high quality of instruction.)

3. Because of the unique nature of aboriginal knowledge and traditional wisdom, the programs can be developed only through consultation and constant communication among the developers and members of the community. This process is crucial, not only in the development phase, but also in implementing the program. Local programs can become a reality only through a commitment to partnership and consultation.

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC LEARNER EXPECTATIONS

"General learner expectations" are the broad, long-range and significant outcomes desired from a program (for example, #2 below). These outcomes are achieved by means of the "specific learner expectations" (for example, #2.2 below).

Students will be expected to:

1. Acquire basic communication skills in an aboriginal language by:

   1.1 becoming familiar with the culture which is inherent in the language;
   1.2 developing listening and speaking skills while understanding and using appropriate intonation, gestures, and visual clues which help to convey the message;
   1.3 developing (in those communities which so wish) reading and writing skills.

2. Develop cultural sensitivity and enhance personal development by:

   2.1 becoming more aware of their own cultural heritage through the learning of their aboriginal language;

2.2 becoming aware of and appreciating, through instruction and direct experiences, the valuable contributions of aboriginal people to civilization;
2.3 broadening their perspectives to include the national and international scene by becoming aware of aboriginal peoples around the world;
2.4 developing a greater awareness and appreciation of various cultural values and lifestyles;
2.5 developing a positive attitude toward people who speak another language through a meaningful exposure to an aboriginal language and culture.

3. Develop originality and creativity in the aboriginal language by:

3.1 enabling them to apply their skills to new and meaningful situations;
3.2 enabling them to express their own ideas and feelings;
3.3 enabling them to discover a new dimension of their personalities.

4. Develop a desire to extend or improve their proficiency in the aboriginal language through further language study (for personal interest, for post-secondary studies or for employment).

5. Acquire additional concepts and generalizations about language and language learning by:

5.1 recognizing the basic structural similarities and differences between an aboriginal language and English;
5.2 acquiring some knowledge of the structure and function of languages;
5.3 developing an awareness of regional, social and functional variations of spoken language;
5.4 developing a conscious knowledge of the skills and strategies used in learning a second language.

Note: These expectations are not listed in order of importance. All of them should receive some degree of emphasis in the program.

Local curriculum developers will define these broad expectations specifically, but still leave room for individual community variations. For example, all aboriginal cultures have "sacred" and "public" knowledge. "Public" knowledge is common

knowledge, and "sacred" knowledge is held by special individuals. Therefore, community Elders and parents must be involved in deciding what cultural knowledge is to be included in the program and who should deliver it.

In all content areas where developers and teachers feel they lack the necessary knowledge or skill to convey a cultural concept, they should approach community Elders and resource people for assistance. The oral nature of traditional knowledge requires close cooperation with and participation by the Elders. Traditionally, Elders were the teachers, and this fact must be taught with more than words. Elders should be a visible and important part of the programs.

STATEMENT OF CONTENT

The program has a cultural component and a linguistic component. Aboriginal language and culture programs, like other second language programs, go beyond instruction in vocabulary and grammar. Language is, in fact, the product of a culture, and culture is expressed through language. The two components are inseparable, and must be taught together.

For the purpose of describing the contents of the program, cultural and linguistic components are listed separately, but they must be integrated in classroom instruction. The communicative teaching approach (see Section Three) is an effective way of achieving this goal.

CULTURAL COMPONENT

There are five broad areas or contexts in which aboriginal culture becomes apparent:

- traditional culture as it existed before the coming of the Europeans;
- legends;
- the students' daily routines, including life at home, in the school, and in the community;

- contemporary cultural events;
- contemporary cultural activities.

1. Traditional Culture

A common problem in schools is having the traditional culture, before contact with Europeans, become confused with the culture as it exists today. Students can gain a better understanding and appreciation of the traditional culture if it is studied as a whole way of life that existed in the pre-contact era.

2. Legends

Legends were used not only to entertain, but also to teach values, attitudes and spiritual knowledge. Today, legends can also be used extensively to teach about traditional culture and to develop language skills. (Community members should be consulted about which legends to teach and how to teach them.)

3. Daily Routines

The aboriginal students' daily routines will contain manifestations of their culture, although they may not be aware of it. Their culture may be present in attitude and style rather than in content. Daily routines also provide many possibilities for language practice in the context of the here and now, which is so important for very young children.

4. Contemporary Cultural Events

Contemporary cultural events such as pow wows are an exciting and concrete context in which students can learn about aboriginal culture and language. Therefore, school programs should make use of such events, either by arranging or encouraging students' direct participation in them or by bringing elements of these events into the schools.

5. Contemporary Cultural Activities

Other activities that are distinctly derived from the traditional culture, such as summer camps, aboriginal art, and preparing special foods, can provide a meaningful context for studying language and culture.

The following scope and sequence chart indicates how these five cultural components might appear in a program for Early Childhood Services through grade 9.

CULTURAL COMPONENT - SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

ECS-Division I (ECS-Grade 3)	Division II (Grades 4-6)	Division III (Grades 7-9)
Traditional Culture		
Begin with child in family →	Progress to seasonal activity →	Progress to conceptual understandings of traditional life and culture
Focus on the "Family Camp": • camp members and relationships • family camp activity and roles • the camp and environment	Focus on the "Seasonal Camp": • primary seasonal activities • seasonal socializing and spiritual life • seasonal land use and travel	Focus on interrelatedness of things: • spirituality • land and elements • economy • material culture
Legends		
Chosen for action/plot →	Chosen for literary and cultural value as well as entertainment aspect →	Comparative legends • oral tradition as a skill
Indirect teaching of culture		
Daily Routines		
Focus on home and school →	Focus on home, school and community →	Focus on home, school and community
Contemporary Cultural Events		
Events in the community →	Events in the community and in nearby communities →	Comparison of events in different tribes Understanding the spiritual basis of events
Contemporary Cultural Activities		
For each division, focus on activities which are appropriate to the age of the students:		
• arts and crafts • songs and dances • making clothing • recreation • land use and skills • summer activities	• crafts • songs and dances • recreation • land use and skills • summer activities	• crafts • songs and dances • recreation • land use and skills • summer activities

LINGUISTIC COMPONENT

The linguistic component of the program has three basic elements, called "functions," "notions," and "communicative styles and strategies." The following description of these elements outlines the scope but not the sequence because each element is meant to be taught continuously throughout the divisions, with an increase in the complexity of the concepts as students become capable of understanding them.

These elements should be taught in the context of a cultural theme, and not as skills to be learned and practiced in isolation. The functions, notions, and communicative strategies and styles to be studied should arise naturally out of a cultural theme.

1. Functions

"Function" refers to what purpose the language serves in a particular situation. The four major categories of language use are:

- giving and getting information,
- expressing and finding out attitudes,
- getting things done, and
- socializing.

Students should be able to use these language functions with increasing skill and in a broader range of contexts over time.

2. Notions

"Notions" are basic semantic concepts that are expressed with language, such as time, location, color and quantity. The cultural content and context of a lesson will determine which notions should be taught. However, students should become familiar with all of the notions in the early stages of this study of the language, and then learn to use them in more complex ways as they advance. For example, for the relational notion of "inclusion":

- a beginner would say, "I want to go too."
- a more advanced student would also know how to say, "But only the elderly are allowed."

The notions, which are described in detail in Section Two, fall into seven major categories:

- existential
- spatial
- temporal
- quantitative
- qualitative
- mental
- relational.

3. Communicative Styles and Strategies

"Communicative style" reflects commonly accepted non-verbal gestures, pauses, and variations in voice which are used in various kinds of discourse and/or in specialized spoken arts, such as storytelling and lecturing. Each language has rules to define these various communicative styles.

"Communicative strategies" are used by students who are learning a second language when they are confronted with language that they do not understand, either in class or in more authentic communicative situations. Effective and efficient language learning depends a great deal upon getting the most out of such situations. Students should learn the common communicative strategies from the beginning:

- using context to guess meaning
- listening for key words or phrases
- using grammatical markers and structures as clues
- listening or watching for communicative styles which may give clues to the meaning.

Section Two

SPECIFICATION OF CONTENT

THE CULTURAL COMPONENT

Several broad categories of content should be included in the cultural component of any aboriginal language and culture program for Early Childhood Services through grade 9. Program developers will need to select which categories to emphasize and decide how much specific detail to provide for their culture and for the teachers who will be using the program. Aboriginal communities that have a relatively homogeneous culture can use a more specifically defined program, whereas in more heterogeneous communities, much of the detail will have to be left to the discretion of individual teachers.

If or when program developers are deciding on specific content, they should work closely with the Elders and ask for their input and advice. Ongoing and active communication between the developers and the communities they represent will provide a better product and increase the likelihood of the program's success when it is put into place. In selecting cultural content, developers should keep in mind that the students' development is sequential. Therefore, content should generally move from the concrete to the abstract, from the child to the world community, from the here and now to the future, and from the active to the passive. This approach (which is used in the scope and sequence outline for the cultural component in this document) should be used at all times to ensure that the lessons remain relevant and accessible to the students.

EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES AND DIVISION I

1. Traditional Culture

In Early Childhood Services through grade 3, traditional culture is probably best approached through the theme of the traditional "Family Camp," that is, the "extended" family, which included all of the people who lived and worked together in a small camp. (Many, but not all, of these people were blood relations.)

Guidelines:

- Present the camp as a whole rather than in parts.
- Focus on activities – what camp members did.
- Teach kinship from the perspective of a child who is between 5 and 8 years old.
- Focus on camp routines from the child's perspective.
- Study relationships between camp members and camp roles.
- Deal with the physical environment in the context of camp activities.
- As much as possible, relate the camp to what the students already know in their own lives.

2. Legends

Students in Early Childhood Services through grade 3 should be exposed to legends, which were traditionally an important educational tool. In choosing legends for this age group, look for:

- action and plot
- characters who are young or who act young
- indirect information about culture.

The use of legends in the classroom should be done in consultation with local Elders and community members, who will be able to explain the local customs and conventions.

3. Daily Routines

Lessons based on daily routines from home and school (and by grade 3 routines involving the community) should follow these guidelines:

- Choose routines that involve family members and classmates.
- Choose routines that are relevant to children of the students' age (5 to 8 years).
- Choose routines that the students take part in at home or school.

4. Contemporary Cultural Events

Community cultural events have much potential for teaching about culture.

Guidelines:

- Choose events which actually occur in the community.
- Choose events in which the students (aged 5 to 8 years) take part.
- Choose events that involve physical activity and excitement.
- Choose events that have behavioral expectations for children, and teach these expectations.

5. Contemporary Cultural Activities

In most aboriginal communities, there are many distinctly cultural activities. For example:

- arts and crafts
- songs and dances
- making clothing
- recreation
- land use and skills
- summer activities.

Teachers should try to involve students in these activities at a level that is appropriate to their age and stages of development.

DIVISION II

1. Traditional Culture

In Division II, traditional culture can be approached through the theme of the traditional "Seasonal Camp." Long ago most activities were closely tied to the seasons. Being knowledgeable about and in harmony with the seasons often meant the difference between life and death.

Guidelines:

- Present the seasons as a whole, showing the transition from one to the other. Emphasize the transitions.
- Study traditional activities in the context of the seasons.
- Study spiritual and social life as they were determined by the seasons.

- Study traditional land use and travel in terms of the seasons.
- Focus upon the roles and ralationships of children aged 9 to 11 years in the context of the seasonal camps.
- Examine how we might learn from the traditional culture (being sensitive to and living with the seasons).

2. **Legends**

Students in Division II can learn legends for their own sake. They can learn about the different kinds of legends and their purpose, and become familiar with local legends. They can begin to appreciate the skill of the storyteller and the great value placed on this person in the traditional culture.

Note: When specifying learning objectives for this section of the program, developers should keep in mind local customs regarding the use of legends.

3. **Daily Routines**

As in Division I, the emphasis in Division II should still be on the family's daily routines, but by grade 6 students will also be interested in the daily routines of friends.

4. **Contemporary Cultural Events**

Community cultural events, which are exciting and rich with potential for cultural learning, should be used as a basis for study and participation.

Guidelines:
- Choose events which actually occur in the community, or nearby.
- Choose events that involve physical activity and excitement and opportunities for socializing.
- Focus on what would be expected of a child their age (between 9 and 11) at these cultural events.
- Begin teaching the significance and meaning of the events.

5. Contemporary Cultural Activities

As for Division I, students can be involved in arts and crafts, songs and dances, and so on as they occur in the community, and at a level that is appropriate for their age and developmental level.

DIVISION III

1. Traditional Culture

In Division III, the aim is to develop an understanding, awareness and appreciation of traditional cultures through activities that involve:

- critical and creative thinking
- problem solving
- inquiry
- decision-making.

The following topics might be discussed in a Division III classroom:

- conservation
- ceremonies, rituals and feasts
- philosophy and spirituality
- interrelatedness in society, in the environment, and so on
- changes in the traditional culture
- land and territory use
- comparisons among aboriginal cultures.

Note: There should be an increased emphasis on thinking skills, but students of this age still need a great deal of "hands-on" and physical activity for effective learning.

2. Legends

In Division III, legends should continue to be taught for their own sake. The students should learn legends from other tribes and nations as well, and compare and contrast their style and content. Students should have opportunities to

develop oral skills and seek out models through extensive experience with Elders and other community resource people.

Note: When specifying learning objectives for this section of the program, developers should keep in mind local customs regarding the use of legends.

3. Daily Routines

The emphasis in Division III should be on socializing and recreational aspects of their daily routines.

4. Contemporary Cultural Events

Community cultural events, which are exciting and rich with potential for cultural learning, should be used as a basis for study and participation.

Guidelines:

- Expand on cultural events activities in Divisions I and II by including inter-tribal events and events in other communities.
- Focus on the spiritual and ceremonial aspects of events, where appropriate.
- Provide opportunities for students to learn some of the special skills that are involved in cultural events.

5. Contemporary Cultural Activities

As for Divisions I and II, students can be involved in arts and crafts, songs and dances, and so on as they occur in the community, and at a level that is appropriate for their age and developmental level.

THE LINGUISTIC COMPONENT

This section indicates the most common linguistic functions and notions; a more detailed list is provided in the Appendix. This list is not sequential. It simply provides a frame of reference for teachers who are planning lessons, charting the progress of individual students, and keeping a record of what has been taught.

FUNCTIONS

1. Giving and Getting Information

Identify: *My name is Ben.*
Report, Describe, Narrate: *He is coming.*
Affirm, Negate: *Yes, it is Lucy.*
Ask: *Where is it?*

2. Expressing and Finding Out Intellectual Attitudes

Agreement/Disagreement: *I don't agree.*
Denying: *We didn't do it.*
Accepting/Declining: *Yes, we would like to go.*
Offering to Do: *Can I help you?*
Knowing: *Do you know his phone number?*
Remembering/Forgetting: *They forgot their books.*
Possibility/ Impossibility: *Will the fire burn all night?*
Capability/Incapability: *She doesn't speak English.*
Logic: *He left early; he must be tired.*
Certainty/Uncertainty: *I'm not sure.*
Obligation: *He has to go home first.*
Permission: *He isn't allowed to stay over.*

3. Expressing and Finding Out Emotional Attitudes

Like/Dislike, Pleasure/Displeasure: *She likes fruit.*
Interest/Disinterest: *He isn't interested.*
Surprise: *My goodness!*
Hope: *We hope it rains.*
Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction: *Is it all right?*
Disappointment: *Are you disappointed you can't go?*
Fear and Worry: *I'm scared.*
Preference: *I would rather walk.*
Gratitude: *I am grateful my mother is well.*
Sympathy: *He was sorry you got hurt.*
Intention: *Are you going out tonight?*
Desire, Wanting: *I want to go to sleep.*

4. Expressing and Finding Out Moral Attitudes

Apology, Forgiveness: *It doesn't matter.*
Approval/Disapproval: *Do you mind him playing with water?*
Regret: *She regrets having quit.*
Indifference: *I don't care.*

5. Getting Things Done

Suggesting Action: *Let's go to the gym.*
Requesting, Inviting Action: *Do you want to sit here?*
Advising Action: *You should get your work done.*
Warning: *Be careful, the teacher's coming.*
Instructing, Directing: *Color the circles red.*
Offering, Requesting Help: *I will put those away.*

6. Socializing

Greeting: *Hello, grandmother!*
Meeting: *This is Harry's father.*
Leaving: *Goodbye until next time.*
Prayers: *Grace.*

NOTIONS

1. Existential

Presence/Absence, Existence/Non-Existence: *Is there game to hunt here?*
Availability/Unavailability: *There is no firewood.*
Possibility/Impossibility: *He may live longer than you.*
Occurrence/Non-Occurrence (to happen): *It happened yesterday.*
Demonstration (to show): *Show me where you live.*

2. Spatial

Location and Relative Position: *inside, outside, this, that*
Distance: *near, far*
Motion: *move, pass*
Direction: *down, left*
Origin: *He started from Vancouver.*
Arrangement: *before, between*
Dimension: *size, length, pressure and weight, volume, temperature*

3. Temporal

Point of Time, Period: *tomorrow, six o'clock*
Tenses: *future, present, past*
Priority: *not yet, before*
Posteriority: *after, later*
Sequence of Events: *first, then*
Simultaneousness: *while, when*
Delay and Lateness: *He will come later.*
Earliness: *You came too early.*
Duration: *It takes a long time to grow.*
Speed: *fast, slow*
Frequency: *often, never*
Continuity: *It is still raining.*
Intermittence/Temporariness/Permanence: *once in a while, forever*
Repetitiousness/Uniqueness: *often, just once*
Commencement: *from then on, since then*

Cessation: *finished eating, stopped raining*
Stability: *stay for a week, wait here*
Change, Transition: *getting larger, become stale*

4. **Quantitative**

Number: *bird-birds, person-people, three, fifth*
Quantity: *enough, another, lots*
Degree: *enough, highest, hardly*

5. **Qualitative**

Physical: *shape, moisture, visibility, audibility, taste and smell, texture, color, age*
Evaluative: *price, importance, difficulty, quality*
Animate/Inanimate

6. **Mental**

Reflection: *know, doubt, thinks*
Expression: *answer, laugh, thank*

7. **Relational**

Action-Event Relations: *Dogs bark. The nurse takes the baby.*
Contrastive Relations: *the same as, nicer than*
Possessive Relations: *my, belongs, owns, has*
Logical Relations: *conjunctions, inclusions, cause, effect*

Section Three

GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY

Knowledge about the aboriginal languages, which are oral languages, cannot be found in books. This knowledge is held by the Elders and other members of aboriginal communities who, therefore, have a vital role to play in the development of a school program. Programs can succeed only through full participation and cooperation from the communities concerned.

Decisions about instructional approaches must also be made with the full participation of the communities, and once the programs are in place, the communities must create a fertile environment for language use. As for all language learning, students need opportunities to practice their skills outside of the classroom. The community can also assist greatly in strengthening the program by helping to prepare locally relevant resource materials.

ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR

The school administrator is responsible for taking the initiative in establishing and maintaining a working relationship with the instructor and the community of Elders and aboriginal parents.

The administrator has a responsibility to understand the unique nature of the aboriginal program – that the purpose of the broadly formulated content is to make the program fully responsive to the community's culture and needs. The administrator must understand that the instructor is teaching in a new way and with few "standard" learning resources. The administrator must realize that the teacher needs encouragement to experiment and be creative. Finally, the job of the administrator is to evaluate the program in cooperation with the teacher and community members.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER

The teacher has a responsibility to be less of a transmitter of knowledge, and more of a facilitator. In this type of program, the teacher must tap the human resources in the community and bring them into the classroom. Like all teachers, but even more so, the teacher of an aboriginal language and culture program must create a curriculum that reflects the perceptions and needs of the community while still recognizing provincial standards and requirements.

The teacher must be open and sympathetic to the students, and create a relaxed atmosphere that is conducive to language learning. The teacher needs to be especially aware of students' interests and motivations, and ensure that these are reflected in classroom activities.

ROLE OF THE STUDENT

Students cannot learn language without active involvement. They must choose to engage fully in expressing their reality and communicating it to others. The program developers and teachers can ensure that learning activities are motivating and meaningful, but students are responsible, in the final analysis, for their own motivation. There is no substitute for an eager and willing student.

ISSUES RELATED TO TEACHING ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

Language is fundamentally oral, and written language is derived from the oral form. However, in cultures that have had a written language for centuries, the written language has taken on a culture and a form of its own. The written form can be considered a language in and of itself. In aboriginal cultures, there is an oral tradition through which information, ideas, thoughts, and feelings have been passed from generation to generation, and the recently developed written forms of these

languages can in no way replace the oral tradition. Nonetheless, the written forms do provide a useful tool in the classroom.

The oral forms of the aboriginal languages naturally have many dialect variations. These variations go beyond simple differences in articulation and intonation, and tend to reflect cultural differences. Consequently, such variations must be maintained in the written forms, and it is, therefore, difficult to use standardized resources and texts. It is a challenge for educators to convey the full cultural meaning of a language to their students.

An important first step in developing a program for any aboriginal language is the clear articulation of a position on three central issues: dialect variations, literacy, and orthography.

1. **Dialect Variations:** One question to be answered is, "Which dialects are to be recognized, how do they differ, and how will they be dealt with in the program?"

2. **Literacy:** Literacy is useful in the classroom but not essential. Some communities believe their language is better left in a strictly oral form.

3. **Orthography:** If a decision is made to develop literacy, then further decisions must be made about orthography (writing system).

All of these decisions should involve the Elders, parents and other concerned people. Although these are sensitive issues, choices have been made successfully in aboriginal communities all around the world. A study of these may be helpful in the decision-making process.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

WHAT IS LANGUAGE?

A language provides a cultural and social framework for the person who speaks it. Culture is expressed through language and therefore the language spoken gives a person his or her view of the world. Language is the tool that people use for perceiving the world; however, it is also the tool they use for negotiating their perceptions with one another. Language enables us to establish an identity, and to establish and maintain relationships with others.

HOW IS LANGUAGE DEVELOPED?

Language development is a continuous, spiralling and cumulative process. The learner is always building upon what is already known as he or she seeks to understand and master new language skills and concepts. This learning process involves social, cultural, and cognitive skills simultaneously.

Learning a language is also an affective process. Since the learner is motivated by the need to understand and to be understood, meaning and comprehension are pre-eminent. Language is best learned in contexts that provide meaning and opportunities to practice and test comprehension.

Learning grammar is learning *about* a language, not learning how to use the language. Learning a language occurs through using the language.

WHAT ARE ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE?

Students communicate "competently" when:

- They can operate in a variety of situations and contexts which are culturally defined.

- They are responsive to the social and cultural constraints and norms involved in discourse.
- Their speech is accurate in terms of articulation and meaning.
- Their speech performs functions successfully.

PROGRAM USE

ENTRY POINTS

The cultural and linguistic components of the program can be combined in various ways, according to the needs of the students.

The entry point for the cultural component should be determined by the age of the students, regardless of the extent to which they have been exposed to the culture before. However, new students should start at the beginning of the cultural component for the division they are in. For example, a grade 2 class that is just beginning to study Cree could begin with the cultural content for the Early Childhood Services through grade 3 level.

The entry point for the language component should be based upon the abilities of the students. All non-speakers of the language should begin at the Early Childhood Services – Division I level, regardless of their age.

The level of language and cultural instruction need not be the same. Students may be ready for lessons at a high level of language competence while studying the Division I level of the cultural content, or vice versa. The program can be adapted for students who have an aboriginal language as their first language or for non-speakers of the language.

Some examples of entry points:

- An 8-year-old student speaking the aboriginal language as his first language would likely require Division II or III language content and Division I cultural content.

- A grade 5 class, where the majority do not speak the aboriginal language, might require Division I language content and Division II cultural content.

THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO TEACHING

Teachers have found that the "communicative" approach is an effective way of integrating culture and language content. Significant features of the communicative approach are:

- Language is never presented simply as vocabulary and grammar, but always in the context of communicating information. Language is *used* rather than "taught."

- Instruction methods take into account the spiralling and cumulative nature of language development. Particular aspects of the language such as functions, notions, and grammar are introduced and reintroduced, but with increasing complexity.

- The teacher helps the learners to discover the language, instead of "feeding" them the language.

- Language is viewed as the sum of verbal and non-verbal communicative behavior.

- Learning activities are related to the learners' needs and interests.

- The teacher uses language which is just beyond the comprehension of the learner. The learner's productive abilities are surpassed by his comprehension.

RECORD-KEEPING AND EVALUATION

1. Recording Language Content

Since learners must be exposed to language functions and notions in a spiralling and cumulative (somewhat repetitious) way, keeping a record of what has been taught is important. The following sample of a record-keeping system may be helpful. After several themes have been recorded, any lack of balance in the types of functions or notions being addressed will become apparent.

			Functions				Notions						
			Giving and Getting Information	Expressing and Finding Out Attitudes	Getting Things Done	Socializing	Existential	Spacial	Temporal	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mental	Relational
Theme	Month	Lesson(s)											
Round Dance	Oct.	6	x	x	x	x		x	x		x		x
Traditional Winter Clothes	Dec.	6	x		x			x	x	x	x		x
Christmas Feasts	Dec.	3		x		x	x		x		x	x	x

2. Student Evaluation

Learners will move along a spiral path as they develop various aspects of communicative competence. The teacher's task is to move them along this path and monitor their movement using a system of regular evaluation.

Guidelines for evaluation:

- Learners should be evaluated in a realistic situation or as close to it as possible.
- Learners should be tested with an extended passage of language rather than with isolated language parts.

- Learners should be tested for skill in comprehension, accuracy, cultural appropriateness, and discourse.

For specific examples of evaluation techniques, refer to Alberta Education's document entitled Evaluation in the Second Language Classroom (1989) which is available from Curriculum Support Branch of Alberta Education.

3. Program Evaluation

School boards should evaluate the program in cooperation with the community of parents and Elders. The Native Parent Advisory Committee, and the school principal and the classroom teacher could work together to seek out the opinions of community members. Questions could address:

- whether students are becoming more proficient in the aboriginal language;
- whether the program is influencing the community positively;
- whether there is enough communication among the teacher, the school and the community;
- whether there is enough parental and community participation in the program; and,
- whether the program is achieving certain goals set by the community.

GUIDELINES FOR LEARNING RESOURCES

"Learning resources" are the print and non-print materials used by the teacher or the students (audio and visual aids, printed materials, computer software, and so on). Learning resources approved by Alberta Education fall into three categories:

- Basic learning resources: the most appropriate for meeting the majority of the goals and objectives of a provincial program of studies.

- Recommended learning resources: complement the basic learning resources and contribute to the attainment of one or more of the major goals of the provincial program.

- Supplementary learning resources: support provincial programs by enriching or reinforcing the learning experience.

In the aboriginal language and culture programs, people are a very important resource. Therefore, resource people should be used extensively, but always with the prior approval of the community.

Because of the degree of variation in dialects and cultures in the aboriginal language groups, it is difficult to provide a standard set of basic learning resources for these programs. Community members should be involved in identifying and/or developing learning resources that they feel are appropriate, using the following guidelines:

- Resources should respectfully portray the culture.

- Resources should authentically represent various aspects of the culture.

- Resources should represent aboriginal values and belief systems.

- The aboriginal language should be authentic, not a translation of ideas, themes, or sentences from English.

- The language used should be the community language.

- The content should accommodate the experiences, interests, and lifestyle of the community and of the individual students.

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APPENDIX

LINGUISTIC FUNCTIONS AND NOTIONS

This list is not exhaustive, nor is it in order of importance. Since culture and language defines for itself which functions and notions are most important, program developers will likely add or subtract items from the list as the languages dictate.

The examples are suggestions only, provided to give developers a sense of the category. Where appropriate, examples of both simple and complex usage are provided to show the range.

FUNCTIONS

1. Giving and Getting Information

Identify
- It is a duck.
- I am John.
- Those are the horses that got away.
- The Assembly is a gathering of people.

Report, Describe, Narrate
- I have a black coat.
- The women have gone home.
- After they left the gathering, some came to our house.

Affirm, Negate
- not, nobody, nothing
- never, always

Ask
- who, what, when, where, why, which

2. Expressing and Finding Out Intellectual Attitudes

Agreement/Disagreement
- yes, no
- Do you think?
- I don't agree.

Denying
- It wasn't me.
- I am not complaining.
- I was not the one who...

Accepting/Declining
- sure, sorry
- I can't come because...
- Would you like to...?

Offering to Do
- Can I help?
- Shall I peel the potatoes?

Knowing
- I know what it is.
- I don't know how to...

Remembering/Forgetting
- I don't remember.
- I have forgotten how to...

Possibility/Impossibility
- It is possible.
- The deer cannot feed with this snow.

Capability/Incapability
- I can do it.
- Is he able to speak his language?

Logic

- Why are you crying? Because I hurt.
- He is still here because he missed his ride.
- If he is back already, he must have got a ride.

Certainty/Uncertainty

- Are you sure?
- There is no doubt that...
- probably, wondering if...

Obligation

- have to, must

Permission

- You may go.
- May we go?
- We are not allowed to eat those.
- May we have a turn after them?

3. Expressing and Finding Out Emotional Attitudes

Like/Dislike, Pleasure/Displeasure

- I like it.
- I don't like to...
- Would you like to...?
- They enjoy canoeing when the water is still.

Interest/Disinterest

- I don't want to.
- Are you interested in learning about...?

Surprise

- Oh my!
- It is surprising.

Hope
- We hope so.
- We hope you will come back.

Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction
- good, okay, great
- Are you satisfied?
- perfect, almost right

Disappointment
- Too bad.
- I'm sorry.

Fear and Worry
- scared
- worried

Preference
- which
- prefer, rather

Gratitude
- I am grateful.
- It was good.

Sympathy
- It makes me feel bad.
- Sorry.
- pity

Intention
- will
- planning to, thinking of

Desire, Wanting
- need to, have to, may I
- He was wanting to...

4. Expressing and Finding Out Moral Attitudes

Apology, Forgiveness

- I'm sorry.
- It was a mistake. It's all right. It is nothing.

Approval/Disapproval

- good, better, best
- shouldn't
- Do you think...?

Regret

- sorry that... too bad that...

Indifference

- It's OK. I don't care. It doesn't matter.

5. Getting Things Done

Suggesting Action

- Let's..., I want to..., Do you want to...?

Requesting, Inviting Action

- Could you...?
- Do you mind...? Would you please...?

Advising Action

- You should...

Warning

- Don't do that!
- Be careful! Watch your step!

Instructing, Directing

- Put things away. Line up.
- After the bell rings, go to the gym.
- Carefully rinse out the color before drying it.

Offering, Requesting Help

- Can I help?
- Please help me to...

6. Socializing

Greeting

- Hello.
- I'm happy to see you.
- How are you? I haven't seen you for a long time.

Meeting

- My name is... My father is...
- Are you related to...? I am from... This is my...

Leaving

- We will see you again.
- It was nice to see you.

Prayers

- grace
- opening prayers
- ceremonial prayers

NOTIONS

1. Existential

Presence/Absence, Existence/Non-Existence

- There is a horse.
- There were many kids in the gym.

Availability/Unavailability

- There are no pencils.
- There won't be any food left.
- Do we have enough hot dogs to serve everyone?

Possibility/Impossibility

- She can't do it.
- I can thread the needle.
- It would be impossible for her to arrive on time.

Occurrence/Non-Occurrence (to happen)

- What happened?
- What will happen after they leave?

Demonstration (to show)

- Let me see!
- Show me the picture.
- We were shown all of the cars.

2. **Spatial**

Location and Relative Position

- here, there, in the...
- to the North, against the...
- that thing far away, not moving, among the...

Distance

- near, far away
- close to the city
- five miles from here to town

Motion

- stop, get up, hurry
- arrive, get away from

Direction

- up, down, follow me
- East, send, push that way
- follow the river upstream, turn at the intersection

Origin

- I'm from Wetaskiwin.
- He walked from the post office.

Arrangement
- first, second, last
- between, against
- among, throughout

Dimension

Size:
- It is big. It is very tall.
- The mice are smaller than the kittens.
- space, thick, thin, narrow

Length:
- It is short.
- It is two centimeters long.
- traditional units of measure

Pressure and Weight:
- light, heavy
- high and low pressure
- traditional units of measure

Volume:
- cup of, half cup of
- bucketful of, gallon
- traditional measures of volume

Temperature:
- cold, hot, warm
- cool, lukewarm, cooler than

3. **Temporal**

Point of Time, Period
- yesterday, in the morning, three days ago
- during
- time telling
- seasons
- traditionally important times

Tenses

Future Reference:

- I will eat it.
- In nine days we will leave.
- I will be gone when the moose come around.
- While he is drinking his pop, you can be eating this.

Present Reference:

- He waits. He is waiting.
- now, still, today

Past Reference:

- She left just yesterday.
- year before last, recently
- long ago before man, formerly

Priority (before)

- I haven't done it before.
- He has already left.
- The leaves hadn't turned brown.

Posteriority (after)

- after I eat, later
- She arrived later than her husband.

Sequence of Events

- first, then, last
- much later on, in the beginning, at last

Simultaneousness

- All together!
- When I clap, you bow.
- It was leaking while it rained.

Delay and Lateness

- Wait a while.
- He is delayed.
- He will be delayed slightly.

Earliness

- Spring is early.
- We have to wake up early in the morning.

Duration

- a short time, a long time
- For many months, he was sick.
- When the sun shines again, we will dance.

Speed

- fast, slow
- faster, slower, as fast as, slowly

Frequency

- every day, usually, always, sometimes, never
- frequently, rarely, monthly, yearly, every spring

Continuity

- It is still raining.
- I have lived here for six years.
- I live for the sake of my children.

Intermittence/Temporariness/Permanence

- We will be done soon.
- The lake doesn't always freeze.
- The bell rings occasionally.

Repetitiousness/Uniqueness

- Do it again!
- once, twice, several times

Commencement

- Let's go!
- He began to talk!
- from that time on

Cessation

- I'm finished!
- That is the end.
- It will snow until it gets cold.
- It was cooked and ready to be eaten.

Stability

- stay, stand, wait
- He has been lying there an hour.

Change, Transition

- He changed into a monster.
- It is getting cold.
- I am becoming tall.
- suddenly

4. Quantitative

Number

Singular, Dual, Plural:

- cat, cats
- mice, people, triplets

Cardinal Numbers:

- one, two, three

Ordinal Numbers:

- first, second, third

Quantity

- no money, a lot of, a little, more
- about, most, hardly any, half of
- another third, a quarter of

Degree

- very, too, best, a lot, fastest, smallest
- hardly, rather, enough

5. Qualitative

Physical

Shape:

- circle, square, oval, rectangle

Moisture:

- wet, damp, dry

Visibility:

- can't see, watch, hidden
- dark, light, see-through

Audibility:

- hear, loud, soft, listen, silence

Taste and Smell:

- nice, bad
- sour, salty, bitter

Texture:

- soft, hard, smooth, prickly, mushy
- thick, thin, strong, rough

Color:

- colors
- light, dark

Age:

- old, young, how old
- stages: baby, teen, young adult, elder

Physical Condition:

- sick, dead
- better, appear

Accessibility:

- open, closed

Presentability:

- clean, wash, dirty
- wrinkled, messy, neat

Material and Genuineness:

- metal, hide, real, made of
- gold, rawhide, sinew

Fullness:

- full, empty

Evaluative

Value, Price:

- how much
- expensive, cheap
- cost more than, valued less than

Quality:

- quality is nice, best, better

Rightness/Wrongness, Acceptability/Unacceptability:

- should not, good
- acceptable, not acceptable
- against the leader

Desirable/Undesirable:

- like

Correctness/Incorrectness:

- right, wrong, better
- true, false

Successfulness/Unsuccessfulness:

- try
- failed, succeeded

Utility/Inutility:

- use
- useful

Capacity/Incapacity:

- can, can't, will

Importance/Unimportance:

- important, not important

Normality/Abnormality:

- normal, strange

Facility/Difficulty:

- easy, hard
- easily, with difficulty

Animate/Inanimate

6. **Mental**

Reflection

- I don't know. Remember.
- not sure, certain, thinks, wondering
- suppose

Expression

- answer, ask, laugh, speak
- thank, apologize, forbid
- recommend

7. **Relational**

Action-Event Relations

Agency:

- He was hit by me. It was I who made him cry.

Objective:

- I ate it.
- John opened the can.
- This tipi was made by John's mother.

Dative:

- I'll give you your own.
- He was given a horse.

Instrumental:

- Color it with red paint.
- Open it with the key.

Benefactive:

- They received money.
- We were given wisdom.

Causative:

- Have your hair braided.
- Can I get my car fixed?

Manner and Means:

- like this, like that
- carefully, gently, quickly, quietly, accurately
- do it with the stick

Contrastive Relations

Equality/Inequality:

- It's the same.
- I want a different one.
- The other one.

Correspondence, Contrast:

- bigger than, smaller, like

Possessive Relations

- my, mine, ours, theirs
- belongs to
- has a car
- gifted with, received

Logical Relations

Conjunction and Disjunction:

- and, but, other, or
- together, either, group
- flock, herd

Inclusion and Exclusion:

- with, too, also
- except, without

Cause and Reason:

- why
- because

Effect:

- because, so

Purpose:

- in order to, purpose of

Condition:

- if, then

Focussing:

- about the books
- Where are they?
- It is my only dollar.